

Briefing on the 1994 Rwandan Genocide

I. Introduction

In a mere 100 days from April 6th to mid-July, over a million Tutsi's and moderate Hutu's were killed in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. A 2002 figure puts the official toll at 1,174,000, although a new report indicates the true figure may be closer to 2 million¹. Except for the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it was the highest killing-rate in human history – nearly three times the rate of Jewish dead during World War II. It could probably also be considered the biggest case of negligence in human history.

II. Background

Oral tradition has it that the pastoral Tutsis (Batutsi) immigrated to Rwanda in the mid-fifteenth century and established a monarchy over the existing groups, namely the Hutu farmers and the original pygmy inhabitants, the Twa. Through a high degree of intermarriage and the creation of a strong hierarchal power structure, the distinction between Hutus and Tutsis became mainly socio-economic rather than ethnic. In fact, a Hutu farmer could become a Tutsi by acquiring wealth and rising through the social hierarchy. The Belgian colonial power (which took control of Rwanda-Urundi from Germany after World War I) showed favoritism towards the Tutsi rulers, a policy that has been accused of representing a divide-and-conquer method. Belgium introduced anthropological studies in the 1920's to find physical differences between Hutus and Tutsis such as height and nose width, which further instigated the Tutsis as the superior ethnicity. The Belgian colonial rule moreover introduced ethnic ID cards that were a legal requirement, which would later become an important tool for ethnic cleansing in the 1994 genocide.

However, the Tutsi immigration account has never been fully substantiated by studies, and the official policy of the current Rwandan government holds that the Hutus and Tutsis groups have always been the same people. In 1995 the government placed a moratorium on the teaching of Rwandan history in schools, arguing that the previous curriculum was biased. This resumed in 2010 based on a resource book for teachers produced in 2008, although no official textbook exists yet². Some have termed this policy revisionist. A more moderate theory has it that the Belgians exaggerated physical differences, which have largely become indistinct through intermarriage. Blood studies have suggested different origins of the Tutsis: although significant genetic differences have been found, the overall difference is small and some can be accounted for by the difference in diet (Tutsis having, historically, been pastoralists). Unfortunately, teaching methods in Rwanda remain largely teacher-centered which discourages open debate among pupils and discussion of multiple versions of the past¹.

¹ <http://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/index.php?i=14924&a=9671>

² The Role of Education in Driving Conflict and Building Peace – The case of Rwanda (Lyndsay Mclean Hilker, UNESCO): <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001913/191301e.pdf>

III. Events Leading Up To The genocide

When the Tutsi King (Mwami) Mutara III died in 1959 under vague circumstances following a visit to a Belgian doctor, many people believed that he had been assassinated which frayed already stressed relations between Tutsi's and the Belgian colonialists. The "Rwandan Revolution" four months later saw ethnic violence with systematic killing of thousands Tutsis for the first time, and a mass exodus of Tutsi refugees to neighboring countries. The Belgian policy under a new military officer, Guy Logiest, was now distinctly pro-Hutu in the name of democracy under the simmering tension³. Belgium held a referendum in 1961 that abolished the monarchy, and the first Rwandan Republic was created under President Grégoire Kayibanda upon independence in 1962. Occasional attacks by Tutsi guerilla groups in 1961 and 1962 only served to increase tensions and reciprocal killings. Ethnic suppression and killings of the Tutsis continued under Kayibanda's rule, with waves of violence flaring up several times often such as in 1961, 1963, and 1973 which saw the killings of tens of thousands of Tutsis and forced up to 150,000 refugees to flee. Kayibanda's government further marginalized the Tutsi population with limiting quotas in schools and civil service offices, and did little or nothing to suppress ethnic violence against them.

When Maj. Gen. Juvénal Habyarimana took power in a military coup in 1973, many Tutsis hoped that suppression would be eased. Habyarimana, a northerner from Gisenyi province, claimed that Kayibanda's government had been corrupt and shown regional favoritism towards Kayibanda's home province of Gitarama. Although Habyarimana installed an authoritarian one-party system, he was in favor with many western donor nations and Rwanda saw relative economic prosperity during his regime. Tutsi's were still marginalized in society and killings would still occur every few years, but to a smaller extent than before. Habyarimana's regime however showed the same kind of favoritism that the previous leader had, and his cronies seemed to be the only people who grew rich. Behind Habyarimana stood his powerful wife Madame Agathe Kazinga and her power circle. Not only was it le "clan de Madame" that profited the most from international donor money that poured into the country, but they also formed the so-called Akazu group of hardcore Hutu power ideologists who planned the genocide.

The Rwandan Patriotic Front, or RPF, was a militarized political group of Tutsi refugees formed in Uganda in 1987. Thousands of their soldiers were veterans of the Ugandan Bush War that had installed Yoweri Museveni in power in 1986, and in 1990 the military branch (Rwandan Patriotic Army, or RPA) launched an invasion of Northern Rwanda with the intentions of forcefully returning to Rwanda, or at the very least pressure the government into entering negotiations. Although the RPA made quick gains towards Kigali, they were pushed back by the help of French paratroopers sent to reinforce the Habyarimana regime. A further set-back came from the death of their commander, Fred Rwigema, on the second day of fighting. The RPA regrouped in the north under the leadership of Paul Kagame, but the war entered a stalemate and negotiations began. Under pressure by the international community, President Habyarimana signed the August 1993 Arusha accords that established a power-sharing government with the RPF and several opposition parties, and provisions were made for multi-party

³ "We Wish To Inform You..." Page 58

general elections. In October 1993, the UN Security Council established the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) with the objective of assisting and supervising the implementation of the Arusha accords. The initial UN presence numbered 2,548 military personnel, consisting of largely Belgian soldiers.

When the RPF invasion in the north began in 1990, Habyarimana's government arrested thousands of Tutsis and Hutus for allegedly being RPF collaborators and sympathizers. That same year, the government propped up an unofficial propagandist newspaper called *Kangura* (Wake It Up) was created by a former street-peddler called Hassan Ngeze. *Kangura* called for people to rally around the president in the struggle against the Tutsi menace, 'proved' Tutsi conspiracies and propagated Hutu supremacy. In December 1990, Ngeze published his most notorious article containing the Hutu Power credo: "The Ten Hutu Commandments". It revised the Hamatic myth of Tutsi immigration, and articulated a doctrine of militant Hutu purity. The commandments warned against Tutsi women, calling the Hutu men who married, befriended or employed them traitors, and said that all Tutsis were dishonest in business dealings. They also called for Hutu solidarity against "their common Tutsi enemy," and the most widely quoted commandment said "Hutus must stop having mercy on Tutsis."

The equivalent of *Kangura* over the airwaves was Radio Television Libres Des Mille Collines, or RTLM, which began broadcasting only 4 days after the Arusha accords were signed. While Habyarimana had been pressured into signing the peace deal by the international community, Hutu Power ideologists were outraged and saw him as a traitor to their cause. RTLM was founded by Akazu allies and friends, and it was entirely devoted to genocide propaganda and Hutu Power songs. Upon the signing of the Arusha accords in 1993, wildly attacked by people such as Ngeze as a worthless agreement, 2500 UN peacekeepers (UNAMIR) and a contingent of 600 RPF soldiers arrived in Kigali to oversee the country's multi-party elections. In January 1994, Roméo Dallaire, the Canadian Major General who commanded the peace keepers, sent an urgent fax to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations at UN headquarters in New York requesting the protection of an important *interahamwe* informant. The informant was a top-level trainer working for the President's MRND party, hired to train the paramilitary youth group called *interahamwe* ("those who attack together") that had been set up only a few years prior. The informant warned of an assassination plot against opposition leaders and Belgian UN troops, planned by the militias to force a withdrawal. He also warned of lists registering Tutsis across Kigali City, apparently for their extermination which was a move he disagreed with, and he believed that President Habyarimana did not have full control over all elements of his party. If he and his family were granted full UN protection, the informant was prepared to reveal a major weapons cache. Weapons en-masse were being brought into Kigali in spite of a UN embargo, and the government was importing excessive amounts of machetes from China. Although Dallaire's fax was most urgent and he planned to raid the cache within thirty-six hours, the response from New York came back negative. The head of peacekeeping, Kofi Annan, had his deputy send back a response that deemed protection of the informant as outside the UN mandate and rejected the planned operation. Instead, Dallaire was instructed to share his information with President Habyarimana, and tell him that the activities of the *interahamwe* "represent a clear threat to the peace process" and a "clear violation" of the "Kigali weapons-secure area." In spite of the United Nations being warned of an imminent massacre, the fax

was largely ignored and the Secretary General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, was never informed of it until much later. On the night of April 6th, President Habyarimana's plane was shot down by a missile as it was preparing to land at the airport. Within hours, road blocks were set up across Kigali by interahamwe soldiers and the killings began.

IV. 100 Days of genocide

Habyarimana's plane crashed into the Presidential palace, apparently downed by a missile fired near the airport. The road blocks across Kigali stopped and searched cars while those they found as Tutsi we killed, often brutally hacked to death by machetes. A military council was convened by Akazu hardliners which declared an emergency government in what amounted to an effective insider coup d'etat: the quick response combined with prophetic messages by RTML only a few days earlier indicates that Habyarimana's own inner circle downed his plane together with his closest aides, as well the Burundian President, although RTML blamed it on the RPF and UNAMIR. Groups of Republican Guard soldiers swiftly moved across the city with lists of Hutu opposition leaders to kill, including the moderate interim Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana. Ten Belgian UNAMIR soldiers who had been sent to protect her were unable to resist with their limited demand, and they were detained, tortured and eventually killed and mutilated just a few hours later. This was the spark that made Belgium withdraw all its troops on April 14th, and on April 21st the UN slashed the UNAMIR force by 90%. All across the country, interahamwe and other armed militias such as the Impuzamugambi (set up by the extremist party CDR) collaborated in pillaging and murdering while the army moved to stop the now-advancing RPF troops in the north. Encouraged by radio stations, local Hutu men were encouraged to kill their neighbors to get rid of the "cockroach" pest, while doctors killed their patients and teachers would kill their pupils. Even pregnant women and children were not spared, with fetuses often ripped out of still-alive mothers. Fleeing people often sought refuge in churches and schools that had traditionally been places of sanctity, but they were instead turned into the largest killing zones. At Murambi technical school in the southwest, the single largest massacre took place with 50,000 Tutsi's were killed in the course of several days. In late April, Nyabarongo river washed up tens of thousands of dead bodies on the shores of lake Victoria, and by May 17th the Red Cross estimated that already 500,000 people had been killed.

After the 90% cut in UNAMIR troops on April 21st, only 270 remained. On the same day General Roméo Dallaire had declared that with just 5,000 well-equipped soldiers and a free hand to fight the Hutu power, he could bring the genocide to a halt.⁴ US Ambassador to the UN, Madeleine Albright, meanwhile drafted Presidential Decision Directive 25, signed by Bill Clinton, which listed reasons for the US to avoid involvement, and contained language encouraging other UN nations to stay out as well. As evidence mounted some countries pushed for a return of UN troops, but arguing continued and the Security Council did not even use the term *genocide* in its resolutions (which would have forced international responsibility). The May 13th vote on restoring UNAMIR strength was postponed another four days by Madeleine Albright, but finally passed a resolution to boost it to 5,500 troops. Financing and transportation wrangles with the US ensued, further delaying the deployment. When eight African

⁴ Pg. 150, *We Wish To Inform You*

nations, spearheaded by Tanzania, offered to send in an intervention force to stop the killings, the US blocked the move and decided to lease the necessary armored personal carriers to the UN. In this manner, May soon faded to June and no UN troops returned to Rwanda until the genocide was over.

By the evening of April the 7th, the RPF contingent of 600 soldiers that had moved from their barracks to the parliamentary building was already under attack. On the morning of April 8th, RPF forces in the north launched an offensive to stop the genocide. The RPF made quick advances and started encircling the capital only 4 days later. By May 22nd, the RPF gained control of Kigali airport and extended their control over northern & eastern Rwanda. Their Eastern forces successfully advanced and took control of the South, reaching Butare by July 2nd. Heavy fighting and shelling of government forces in Kigali city continued throughout May and June, often with house-to-house battles for control of various suburbs. Finally by July 4th the RPF gained control of the entire Capital after the withdrawal of government forces. The French "Operation Turquoise", approved by the UN on June 22nd, sent 2,500 French troops to create a 'safe area' in government-controlled south-west Rwanda. However, this had no effect on stopping the massacres, and the French have actually been accused of collaborating with genocidaires. The safe zone also halted RPF advances in the area, effectively helping genocidaire forces flee to Zaire (DRC) towards the end of the war. By July 14th, civilian refugees fleeing the RPF advance in north-western Rwanda were flooding into Zaire at a rate of approximately 10,000-12,000 refugees per hour, crossing into the border town of Goma. Many civilians fled in fear over RPF retribution due to propaganda, while others were forced to leave. The massive influx creates a severe humanitarian crisis, with an acute lack of shelter, food and water. With lack of oversight, fully-armed forces of the former government filtered into refugee camps, re-created the old social hierarchy and effectively took control of them.

On July 18th, the RPF announced that the war was over, declared a cease-fire and named Pastor Bizimungu, a moderate Hutu, as president with Paul Kagame as Vice-President and Faustin Twagiramungu as prime minister. In the course of only one hundred days, over a million people had been brutally massacred. At the height of the genocide, armed gangs across the country reached a killing rate of 7 people per minute, the highest ever achieved in the history of mankind. Up to half a million women had been raped, more than a million children had been orphaned, and approximately 42,000 house-holds were headed by children below the age of 18.

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